

THE DESIGNS
OF THE
DEATH OF CHRIST;
A
SERMON,

DELIVERED IN OCTOBER,

1794,

AT

PARLIAMENT-COURT CHAPEL,
ARTILLERY-STREET.

BY
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1795.



THE DESIGNS

OF THE

DEATH OF CHRIST.

JOHN xix. 30.

And he bowed his Head, and gave up the Ghost.

THERE is no fact better attested than the death of Christ. The Jews were witnesses of it; and to this day they own that their fathers crucified Jesus, and, like their fathers, they justify the murderous deed. By our law, say they, he ought to die, because he made himself the son of God! John xix. 7. And on this account, and for rejecting the salvation afterwards preached to them in his name, 'Wrath came upon them to the uttermost.' 1. Theff. ii. 16. so that they have been wanderers, and outcast among the nations for more than seventeen hundred years; and have

awfully felt the weight of that imprecation of their fathers when they slew the Lord of life. 'His blood be on us and on our children.' Matt. xxvii. 25.

Many of the Gentiles were also witnesses of the fact; and it is a circumstance well known in Roman history, that Jesus Christ was crucified under the government of Pontius Pilate.

As for the disciples of Jesus, so far were they from concealing the ignominious death of their Lord, that they considered it at once (in connection with his resurrection) as a proof of his Messiahship, and as the ground of their hope for acceptance with God. They said, his cruel death was a fulfilment of prophecy; they boldly preached salvation to sinners in his name; they boasted in his death as an atonement for sin, and they gloried in his cross.

If it be asked, Why are we furnished with such clear evidence of the truth of this fact? the answer is, Because it is a fact of that importance

portance in the scheme of revelation, that the whole of Christianity depends upon it. If Jesus had not died, then the twenty-second Psalm, the fifty-third of Isaiah, and many more of the prophetic writings, would not have been fulfilled, types would not have been accomplished, nor would there have been any way of access opened for sinners to the Father.

As the Scriptures insist largely upon his death, so it is natural to suppose that they likewise clearly tell us of the designs which were to be accomplished by his dying.

And though all sects of modern Christians acknowledge that he died ; yet it is evident, they are greatly divided in sentiment about the intention of his death : some affirming that he died for one end, and some for another : and the contention has often been hot among them upon this subject.

I have often thought that many of the disputes among Christians have arisen chiefly from their partial views of the Scriptures. I

have observed, that each party of them has taken some portion of truth, and insisted upon it as the whole; hence the animosity of different denominations against each other has been carried to an enormous height, to the great discouragement of many serious minds, and to the no small triumph of the enemies of revealed truth.

Every attempt, therefore, to give a full scriptural view of any contended subject in religion, must be considered in a favourable light by every honest and good man, as having a tendency to reconcile the different sects of Christians; or at least to abate their party enmity, and dispose them towards that union which our Blessed Lord so fervently prayed for. John xvii. 22, 23.

My present business is to endeavour to set the designs of Christ's death in a scriptural light.

I have already sacrificed both my character and connections to the love of truth, and feel myself not unwilling to make any other sacrifice

crifice that may be called for in my pursuit of it. I shall therefore speak with the freedom of a man who fears the frowns of no party, nor courts the smiles of any.

The error of Christians in the subject before us doth not lie in saying more of the death of Christ than the Scriptures say, but in not saying *all* that the Scriptures say.

There is nothing unreasonable in supposing that Christ had many ends in view, which were to be accomplished by his death; and if the Scriptures mention fifty, we ought to believe them all, for they will all be fulfilled in the dispensation of the fulness of times, which God hath ordained in which to perform the good pleasure of his will.

Nor is it uncommon in the conduct of God to include many great designs in one great action; as in choosing the Jewish nation, and bringing them into a covenant relation to himself.

1. He therein fulfilled the promises which he had made to their fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

2. He secured to himself a peculiar people for many ages, while the nations of the earth walked in their own way, by which he shewed his sovereignty.

3. He made this people witnesses of his own unity among the nations who worshipped a plurality of gods.

4. He made the Jews the instruments of spreading an expectation of a Messiah among the Gentiles.

5. By their separation from other nations, he ascertained the descent and lineage of Christ, as the son of David, and of Abraham.

6. Hereby also he made the Jews the keepers of Old Testament Scripture, for the confirmation of the faith of New Testament believers.

7. His

7. His conduct towards them may be considered as a miniature picture of his dealings with all the sons of men ; which is held out for general instruction. Lev. xxvi.

8. From the whole of which he seems to design to teach us, that the Jews were not chosen for their own sakes, but for the sake of others, as the elect of God are chosen now, to be the salt of the earth, and the light of the world, and that they may be kings and priests to God and to Christ in the millennial age.

Now, as the death of Christ is one of the greatest transactions that are recorded in the Bible, we may naturally expect to find the designs of God therein to be many and great ; and in fact we shall find them so to be.

1. Christ died that whosoever believeth in him might be saved from the second death, which is the wrath of God due to sin in the future world. In proof of this, we are told that Jesus delivered us from the wrath to come. 1. Theff. i. 10. And again, Believe in the
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the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. Acts xvi. 31. Again, God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. And he that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. John iii. 16. 18. 36.

Through faith in Christ did the apostles preach justification to men, yea, to the vilest of men; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood; to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God: to declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Through his blood (says the Apostle to the Colossians) we have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins.

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The Corinthians, though some of them had been men of the most hateful character, yet found salvation in the same way. 1. Cor. vi. 9—11.

Yea, the murderers of Jesus, many of them, upon seeing the proof of his resurrection from the dead, by the pouring out of the spirit, believed, repented, and were saved from the wrath to come. Acts ii.

The dying thief, in his day, partook of this mercy of God, by faith in his Son, and was delivered from the second death : for, in answer to his prayer, Jesus said, Verily, I say unto thee, to day shalt be with me in Paradise. And many in our day also, even all those who believe in him, and continue to the end, will be saved from the second death.

And herein is the doctrine of mercy most gloriously displayed ; for the most guilty among men are welcome to present salvation ; and *whosoever* cometh to the Father, by faith in Christ, shall not be cast out.

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This, then, is one design of the death of Jesus, and a glorious one it is. The full accomplishment of this design will be the gathering together, or assembling of the *first-born*, whose names will be found written in heaven ; and they will be esteemed a kind of *first fruits* of God's *creatuers* to himself. Heb. xii. 23. James i. 18.

Many Christians have talked, and preached, and written, as though this was the only end of Christ's death. But we hope to prove, that the wisdom of God had many other and glorious ends to answer in the death of his Son.

2. Christ died to fulfil the prophecies, so far as they related to his first appearance upon earth ; for as the prophets had described his birth, life and doctrine, so they had also described his death, even to the minute circumstances of it, see Isaiah liii. 4—9. And also Psalm xxii. the first words of which our Lord uttered as he hung upon the cross, thereby giving us a clue as to the meaning of the Psalm at large.

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And to the prophecies that relate to his death, John xix. 30. he referred when he spoke his last words, 'It is finished,' meaning thereby that the Scriptures concerning him were finished, see verse 28. 'Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar, and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus, therefore, had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished; and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.' See Psalm lxix. 21.

And that our Lord meant that the prophecies were fulfilled, when he said, It is finished, is further proved from Luke xxii. 37. For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me. And he was reckoned among the transgressors, for the things concerning me have an end.

Nor was this a small design in the death of Christ; for the fulfilment of the Scriptures in his death was necessary to prove the truth of
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his mission as the Messiah. 1. Cor. xv. 3. This is a matter that deserves special consideration by every Christian ; for probably the day is not far off in which we shall have occasion for all the evidence which the Scripture affords us to prove that Jesus is the Christ ; as it is likely that infidelity will soon overspread the world as universally as ever superstition has done heretofore.

I would recommend it therefore to every believer to study the accomplishment of prophecy in the person of Jesus of Nazareth ; especially in his death, which is the subject we are now upon, as it will prove that the Scripture cannot be broken ; and thereby shall we find our faith confirmed, so that we shall not be moved from our steadfastness, nor fall into the snare of the wicked. 2. Pet. iii. 17.

3. Christ died to sanctify his church. Ephes. v. 25. Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle,
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or any such thing. but that it should be holy and without blemish.

The sanctification of believers is often mentioned in connection with the death of Christ; and we are informed, that as he died *for* sin, so we are to fetch an argument from hence to die *to* sin, as Rom. vi. 11, 12. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

And hereby we may know whether we belong to his church or to the church of Satan (for Satan hath a church, Rev. ii. 9. and iii. 9.) ; namely, if by faith we cordially enter into this design of the death of Christ, and find our hearts purified from dead works to serve the living God; for the church of Christ is made up of those persons of every denomination who by him now receive the atonement upon their consciences, Rom. v. 11. ; by this they rejoice in God, have fellowship with Christ in his sufferings, and are
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made conformable to his death, Phil. iii. 10. : these shall have part in the first resurrection, shall be blessed and happy, and have a portion in his kingdom when he appeareth.

4. Christ died to confirm his doctrine. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. John xviii. 37. He resisted unto blood striving against him; and if he had not done so, we could not have been sure that his doctrine was true; but by this he hath stamped the highest credibility upon it. And when we behold him, who was the teacher sent from God to make known unto men the way to life, shedding his blood, our faith is mightily confirmed in him, and we have a strong foundation for obedience to all his precepts.

5. He died that he might take away the fear of death from his people; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the Devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their life time subject to bondage. Heb. ii.

14, 15.

14, 15. Now the fear of death is a great evil, and it should seem the Old Testament saints were very subject to it. Psalm xxxix. 13. and the case of Hezekiah proves it also. Isaiah xxxviii. 9. onward. Our Lord, by his death and resurrection, has assured his saints of a triumph over death and the grave, for he hath brought life and immortality to light; and therefore a dying Christian may use the triumphant language of the Apostle, O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

6. He died to fulfil and abolish the ceremonial law. The whole ceremonial law appears to have been typical; and a very great part of it was fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The epistle to the Hebrews represents Christ as the substance of the typical sacrifices, which appear to have had no intrinsic value, their use being chiefly to point to Jesus the true Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world. The gifts and sacrifices offered in the Jewish worship could not make

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him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience ; for their service stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings and carnal ordinances imposed on them, until the time of reformation. But Christ being come, an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building ; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. The law was a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ.

7. He died that he might unite Jews and Gentiles in one body. Ephes. ii. Ye (Gentiles) were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ ; for he is our peace who hath made both (Jews and Gentiles) one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law

law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace, and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity of Jews. and Gentiles thereby, and came and preached peace to you (Gentiles) which were afar off, and to them (the Jews) that were nigh ; for through him we both have an access by one spirit to the Father.

This great design of Christ's death has hitherto been but partially fulfilled ; nevertheless it shall be fully accomplished when the Jews, at Christ's coming, shall be converted, and then the whole body of them shall be joined to the believing Gentiles, and altogether shall become one fold under one shepherd.

8. That he might be the life of the world. John vi. 51. The whole world, in its fallen state, lieth in wickedness, it is without spiritual life, and is under sentence of death ; but Christ died for the world, to take away its sin, yea, for the whole world. 1. John ii. 2. And this he did that he might be the Saviour of the world. 1. John iv. 14. John iv. 42. and iii. 17.

Nor is it any contradiction that the Scripture tells us that Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, and also that he gave his flesh to be the life of the world ; for it is both true, and the church, as the first-born, shall reap the benefits of redemption, without tasting the second death, and the rest of mankind shall, in the dispensation of the fulness of times, be gathered together in Christ Jesus, by which it shall appear that he actually is, as the Father designed him to be, the Saviour of the *world*. The above view is highly honourable to Christ, as it efficaciously extends the merit of his death ; and I must either believe this, or something else very dishonourable to God : as first, I must believe that God only meant to save his elect, and that he gave his Son to die for them only (and that notwithstanding the Scripture tells me his tender mercy is over *all* his works, and that he gave his Son to die for the world, the whole world, for all men, and for every man).

Or, secondly, I must believe that God loves every man, has given his Son to die for every man, and desires to save every man, but that

that his love will not prove efficacious. The blood of Jesus will be found to be shed in vain with respect to millions, for whom he died, and that the desires of God for the good of his creatures shall fail of success; and this, notwithstanding the Scripture tells me that there is no variableness or shadow of turning with God. James i. That the Father promised the Son that he should see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied; and that he *will* perform *all* his pleasure, and his counsel *shall* stand. Now neither of these two I can believe, because I view them as contrary to Scripture, and as dishonourable to the character of God, and inimical to the glory of Christ; but the former I am constrained to believe, because I think it scriptural, and that it brings glory to God and to Christ.

9. That he might be our forerunner. The Apostle mentions him in this character. Heb. vi. 20. Within the veil the fore-runner is for us entered, even Jesus. And Christ told his disciples that he went to prepare a place for them; and it is evident that his death was necessary for that end. I am persuaded that

no man ever entered heaven until he himself took possession of it, and that then he introduced a great company with singing. Psalm xxiv. 7—10. And then also he opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers ; so that now whenever the true believer departs hence, he is immediately with Christ : and this it was which made Paul desire rather to depart than to be here ; and so every real Christian who loves our Lord Jesus Christ can but desire to depart and be with him.

10. To shew his obedience to the Father's will. He came to do the will of the Father, John vi. 38. ; and his dying for sinners was one part of his work. He had received a commandment from the Father to lay down his life, John x. 18. ; and he freely did lay it down, saying, not my will, but thine be done. So profound was his reverence of the Father's will, and so entire his confidence in the Father's wisdom, that even this hard command was submitted to without murmuring ; yea, as he had voluntarily undertaken to do it, so did he voluntarily perform it. His language was, I delight to do thy will, O God, thy
law

law is within my heart. For the Father's will was his law, so let it be ours.

11. To shew his love to his friends, yea, to his enemies. By the friends of Jesus, I mean, his disciples. John xv. 18. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I have commanded you.

All who answer the above character in every age may rejoice in that great love of our dear Lord, which he discovered in dying for them ; for they enjoy the immediate benefits of his death, even the pardon of sins—access to God with boldness, and freedom from all condemnation. In the happy enjoyment of these blessings of grace, they are enabled to love him more and more, and to live to him who died for them, to love the brethren or friends of Jesus also, so as to lay down their lives for them, if called to it.

1. John iii. 16. Yea, Christ loved his enemies, and died for them also. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ

died for the ungodly ; and who can doubt but that an ungodly sinner is an enemy to an holy Jesus ? yet even such, while enemies, were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.

Christ died even for his worst enemies, the Jews, who sought his blood. Away with him, away with him, Crucify him, crucify him, say they ; but he said, Father, forgive them, they know not what they do. Thus he the just one died for the unjust, to bring them to God.

What rich encouragement arises hence for those who are convinced of their guilt : what though in themselves they are miserable, yet behold a ransom is found out, and believing sinners shall be spared from going down to the pit.

12. To gain universal power, by going through all states. The Scripture represents him as coming from heaven, dwelling upon earth, dying and descending into the prison or hell : and this latter view of him we still have

have in that ancient formulary of faith called The Apostles Creed ; not that I think that creed was made by the apostles, though it seems to me to contain an apostolic sentiment, when it says of Christ, He was dead and buried, he descended into hell ; and this is enough to screen the sentiment from the charge of novelty, which by many is frequently brought against it.

The Apostle Peter clearly teaches that Christ went into hell ; for when preaching to the Jews, Acts ii. he applies the words of David, Psalm xvi. to him, Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell : and in his first epistle, chap. iii. 18. he says, Christ was put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the spirit, i. e. by the soul as opposed to the flesh or body ; by which spirit or soul he went (in his disembodied state) and preached to the spirits (or souls) in prison or hell : then describing those spirits more particularly, he says, They were those which sometime (or once) were disobedient, namely, in the days of Noah, when the long-suffering of God waited on them. But God waited in vain for their repentance at that

that time ; for they continued rebellious, and were cut off. But the gospel, says Peter, was preached to them that are dead, for this cause, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. 1. Pet. iv. 6. Our Lord, by dying and descending into hell, became possessed of power in hell, as really as he is possessed of power on earth or in heaven : now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the *lower parts* of the earth, i. e. hell. He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might *fill all things*, i. e. that his power might extend to all states that his creatures could ever be in.

To the same purpose Christ says to John, Rev. i. 18. I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen, and have the keys of hell and of death. And so Paul tells us, Rom. xiv. 9. for to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living. From these scriptures it appears, that it was one end of Christ's death to gain universal

versal power, and he now of right possesses it, and no doubt but he will use it well ; and in the exercise thereof will perform the Father's eternal purpose, and gather together in one *all* things, whether they be things in heaven (of heavenly original), or things on earth (of earthly original). Ephes. i. 10.

13. That he might as a priest be our advocate above. It was one part of the work of the high priests, who were typical of Jesus, to go within the vail with the blood of atonement, and there to intercede for the people ; so he is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, ~~what is this chaos for~~ but into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God for us; and he entered in not by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood. Heb. ix. 24. and 12.

The intercession of Christ is a subject of great consolation to every sinner who is sensible of his guilt, as it represents to him an open way to the Father, in which he may securely come and find acceptance and salvation.

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As the intercession of Christ is founded upon the merit of his death, so we are informed that it shall continue until every end of it is fully answered ; for he is able to save to the uttermost (to the case of the last individual) them that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth (or liveth to the age) to make intercession for them.

14. To take away the sin of the world, and to lay a foundation for universal reconciliation to God. We have before noticed the universality of the death of Christ, which was a truth so fully admitted in the apostles days, that he reasons upon it as a fact that nobody disputed it. 2. Cor. v. 14, 15. ' For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead ; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.'

The apostle tells us, in Col. i. 19. that it pleased the Father that in him (Christ) should all fulness dwell (and having made peace through

through the blood of his cross) ; by him to reconcile *all things* unto himself ; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

Now, if he died for all, with an intention to reconcile all unto the Father, I infer, that he will actually do that which he intended. In support of which inference, it is said, Ephes. i. 9, 10. the Father hath made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself ; that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in him.

15. That he might be our example. Many have spoken of this design of the death of Christ, as though it was the only one he had in dying ; while others have represented the matter as though his only design was to make an atonement for sin : whereas the truth is, he died for both those purposes. In the one, we are taught to approach to God by faith in the blood of his Son ; in the other, we are taught

taught to suffer and bear the will of God, like him. It becomes us, therefore, to study the character of Jesus, that we may see the temper of mind in which he suffered the greatest contradiction of sinners against himself, not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise, good for evil, and blessing for cursing ; for even hereunto were we called, that we may inherit a blessing.

Christ, when in his agony in the garden, meekly submitted to the will of God : Not my will, but thine be done ; and herein he hath taught us the most entire resignation to the Father. When, therefore, we understand properly the ends of his death, we shall, in all our sufferings, whether spiritual or temporal, be like him ; by which we shall have fellowship with him in his sufferings, and be made conformable to his death.

It is an excellency in the character of our Lord, that he reduced his precepts to practice in all his conduct.

16. That

16. That he might lay a foundation for an empire that should never be overthrown. As extent of dominion, so perpetuity of empire belongs to Jesus. The prophet Daniel, when he treats upon the four great empires, viz. Babylonian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman, represents them as overthrown each by the other in succession. Dan. vii. 1—7. and the kingdom of Christ as destroying the last of them, and swallowing up the remains of them all. 9. to 27. and thereby becoming universal and perpetual : and in the same manner he describes the kingdom of Christ in his second chap. v. 34, 35. and 44. where Christ's kingdom is said never to be destroyed, not to be left to another people, but to stand for ever ; that is, till the mediatorial *age* is finished.

Now we are informed, in Phil. ii. 6.—11. that the kingdom of Jesus is founded upon his humbling himself to the death of the cross, and that his power is extended over things in heaven, things on earth, and things under the earth, namely hell ; and that he shall rule till every knee in those regions shall bow to him, and every tongue in them shall confess

fess that he is Lord, to the glory of the Father : therefore his empire shall not be overthrown ; for he shall reign till he hath put down all rule, and all authority and power, and then he shall deliver up his mediatorial kingdom to God, even the Father, and then shall God be all in all. 1. Cor. xv. 24—28. Thus will the kingdom of our Lord be finished, not by being overthrown like other kingdoms, but by being surrendered to the eternal Father.

Thus I have briefly attempted to shew the designs of the death of Christ. However feebly I may have spoken, I have honestly declared my sentiments on this subject. Probably there may be more designs in the death of Jesus than I have mentioned. You, my brethren, are to judge for yourselves. May we be directed into truth ; may we walk in the fear of God, and in love towards all men.

END OF THE SERMON.

